



GENDER GAP IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEPALI COMMUNITIES OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Nepali society is a patriarchal society in which women are generally dominated by men. As such, it is widely believed that production activities are mainly carried out by men and those of the house hold are performed by women. Gender issue is an important factor in studying the socio economic status of women in Nepali community of Assam. Educational attainment, decision making role of women in both individual and societal level in Nepali societies are not at all satisfactory. In this study an attempt has been made to study the social status of Nepalese women in Dhemaji district of Assam. The work participation rate among the women of the study community is very poor. Majority of the women workers practice agricultural and cattle rearing which do not upgrade their status in the society. This research work tries to measure the magnitude of assimilation of the Nepali community with the local community. The study was carried out intensively and extensively at the micro-level. The study gave a picture of gender gap situation in the Nepali society of Dhemaji district and few important causes of gender disparity in higher education were also given.

KEY WORDS: Nepali, Patriarchal, Dhemaji, Gender gap, Socio-economic, Micro-level.

INTRODUCTION:

The Nepali community with a population of over 1.5 lakh is fairly dominant in the northern southern and eastern part of Dhemaji district, especially in Gogamukh, Mingmang, Moharicamp, Jairampur, Santipur, Bauli, Sissikalghar, Silapathar, Dimou, Semen and Jonai areas. Nepali people are considered to be immigrated into the district starting from early 1850s.

Nepali society is a patriarchal society and the male is the head of the family. Therefore Gender issue is an important factor in studying the social status of women among the Nepali community. Educational attainment, increasing labour participation and decision making role of women in both individual and societal level certainly enhanced the status of women in their respective societies. In this study it has been supposed to scratch the underlying actual socio literary status of Nepalese women in Dhemaji district of Assam. Nepali society is the social fabric of Assamese community. According to Subedi (2010) men in the society are considered as the 'Protector', 'Provider' and hold at a superior position in the family. Domestic violence against women is found among the less educated Nepalese society in the interior places of Assam. More specifically, rural Nepali women of Assam are not well treated and they are compelled to provide the service for the owner (husband). They cannot raise their voice against any injustice done by the any other male members of the family and so they kept silence all the time. In other words, girls are dominated by father, mother or brother in their own home before marriage and she often faced marital violence by her husband or other in-laws. In socio-cultural status of Nepali women marriage is early and universal, and it is viewed as disgrace for a Nepali couple, particularly for the wife, not to have any children. High fertility is desired because by producing children, preferably sons, a woman raises her status in the family. The social myth also indicates that women are basically inferior to and their labour, efforts, social right, role in decision making are less valuable than men. A strong son preference for socio-economic and religious reasons such as economic gain and old age security has been uniform among all the Nepalese. This contributes a factor of population growth. These results in the decline of economic condition of a family and thus female children are deprived of adequate facilities of education, food and freedom. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India, in their eleventh five year plan for Girl Child (2007-2012) mention girl's nutritional intake is inferior in quality and quantity while boys have access to more nutritious food. As a result, 56 percent girls of the age group 15-19 years suffer from anemia. Gender inequality thus begins at home, a mother usually prefers a son to a daughter because sons can be especially important for women's old-age security (Cain 1993). This is one of the important issues of declining women status of Nepali society which leads to Gender inequality in higher education. Nepali women particularly in rural and remote areas are disempowered resulting from patriarchal, social and cultural prejudices and civil and political unjust that legitimize and maintain unequal power relation between men and women in all private and public sphere (UNESCAP: 2000; Gandhi: 2004). Most people refuse to believe that Nepali women can also be educated and can have their own thinking. Educational Status of Nepali women is an indicator of social status, is very poor among the Nepali community.

Education is an instrument of social change and it is the first step towards literacy. Education and literacy both of two are co-related. Education may mean formal education and non-formal education. Formal Education obtained from school setting and non-formal education is obtained any other source. In the pres-

ent world, technology is developed day by day but many Nepali villages of Assam, literacy rate of woman is very poor due to neglecting women education of our society. Education plays a vital role in the progress of a nation. In the present day maximum percentage of rural areas Nepali women face illiteracy problem. If women are educated then they will be aware of her right and fight against various problem related to her. According to census of India women literacy is upgraded from 1951 to 2001 it increases 7% to 54%, unfortunately only 39% of women are literate as compared men's 64%. On the other hand in Assam, census 2001 the literacy of women are 56% and male are 71.93%. Among the Assamese Nepali women the literacy rate is 53% against the male 73%. Nepali girls are not sent to school because they have to assist their mother at home in her all domestic affairs. Before the first menstruation the girls are allowed to go to school if the schools are not very far from their home. After the menstruation the girls were seldom sent to the schools. They have to lead their life under strict restriction. They are not allowed to talk freely with the male counter parts. In such situation maximum Nepali girls had to remain complete illiterate or half literate. Besides Nepali medium schools are not available so they have to learn in Assamese language. In remote areas where the parents are not conscious they do not value the education. In this way particularly Nepali girls were kept deprived of going to schools or colleges for higher education. There is lot of constraints of getting higher education for girls than boys in Nepali society as they have been considered inferior than the boys.

Dhemaji is one of the districts of Assam with an approximate population of 6.5 lacs. It is situated between 27°-28°N and 94°-96°E. Nepali population in the district is estimated about 1.5 lakhs. The research work was conducted in five Nepali populated areas of Dhemaji district of Assam.

ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM:

The research work is undertaken to study the Gender gap in Higher education in the Nepali society of Dhemaji district of Assam. Nepalese have diversified culture and they are found scattered in riverine areas or in the foot hill areas where forest and grasslands are found available. Their main profession is to rear cattle for milk. They sell milk in the towns and thus they are maintaining their livelihood. They prefer river bank areas most because the cattles specially cows, buffaloes and goats can graze freely in the *Chaparis* (river islands). They have, therefore, developed a symbiotic relationship with the nature and the animals. In *Char Chapari* areas there is no schools or learning institutions. Parents cannot send their daughters to far distance for schooling rather it is not at all possible. It is very much shocking that in this fast changing world where the women have been given same status to the men but on the other hand the Nepali women have been deprived of getting the light of education. So under such circumstances it is decided to do some work for these deprived women where alarming situation of gender disparity in higher education prevails.

METHODOLOGY:

A survey was carried out during 2015 (January to April) to collect information on the gender disparity among the Nepali people of Dhemaji district. Oral interviews were held with 100 informants. The average age of the informants was 50 years or above approximately. Respondents were 150 male and 150 female. Six Nepali populated areas were selected in the district. The selected villages were three from Dhemaji sub division e.g. Mohari camp, Sissikalghar and Machkhowa, three from Jonai sub division e.g. Silapathar, Dimow and Jonai,

From each village one village head and elderly men and women were selected. Under these village areas there are many small villages which are not included in this paper but data had been collected from these villages. The informants having good knowledge on socio economic condition and gender inequality in women education were chosen for the interview. The informants were asked about the different constraints faced by the women in the families. At the beginning the informants especially women were reluctant to say something about the problems faced by them but after making several trips to these areas good feelings of sympathy and understanding could be established with them.

A Survey was made in the areas where the population of Nepali people was concentrated. A questionnaire was prepared for the interview purpose. The questionnaire was thoroughly scrutinized, analyzed and displayed in the table. The interview was conducted in the following manner-

- Interview with elderly People both male and female
- Photographs and audio recording where necessary
- Collection of the information through audio visual aids if necessary
- Preparation of database of the illiterate Nepali women
- Comparative study of the literacy attained by women of the different ethnic groups of Dhemaji district.

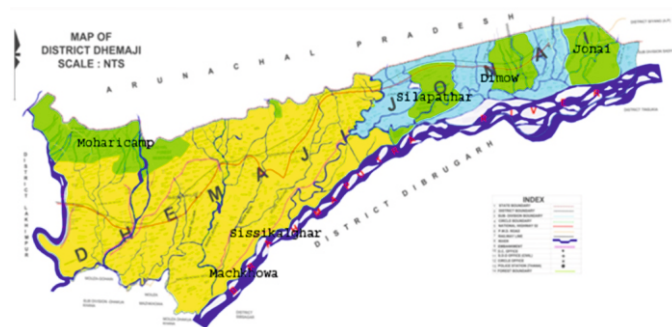


Figure 1 Map of Dhemaji and surveyed areas

RESULTS:

Table 1
Details about the college/Higher secondary school going students

| Sub Divn. P.C. | Vill | Pln | No of Boys | No. of girls | Total | Total |
|----------------|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| 1. Dhemaji | MCP | 6700 | 370 (5.52 %) | 410 (6.11%) | 780 | 11.64 |
| | SKL | 5050 | 276 (5.46%) | 104 (2.05 %) | 380 | 7.52 |
| | MCK | 2020 | 110 (5.45 %) | 104 (2.05 %) | 214 | 10.52 |
| 2. Jonai | SLP | 9020 | 350 (3.88%) | 310 (3.43%) | 660 | 7.31 |
| | DMW | 5025 | 130 (2.58 %) | 30 (0.59 %) | 160 | 3.17 |
| | JNI | 7086 | 308(4.34 %) | 210 (2.96%) | 518 | 7.31 |
| Total | | 34901 | 1544 | 1168 | 2712 | |

(Abbreviation: MCP= Mohari camp, SKL= Sissikalghar, MCK= Machkhowa, SLP= Silapathar, DMW= Dimow, JNI= Jonai, Pln= Population)

The highly Nepali populated villages are given as follows:

MCP: Mohari camp, Halakhbari, Tajik, Chilimpur

SKL: Sissimukh, Jorkata Nepali village, Bauli, Sissitangani

MCK: Bopak, Bengena garah, Gondhia, Deogharia

SLP: Society, Phulbari, Majgaon, Akajan, Jipu

DMW: Dimow, Dipa, Santipur, Naharbari

JNI: Bahir Jonai, Lai mekuri, No.1 Tari Nepali, Ujani Bijoypur

DISCUSSION:

Though there are many more Nepali Villages in Dhemaji district but only 24 villages were considered for this research purpose. 4 villages were taken from each surveyed area. The result shows that the maximum number of college going Nepali students found in Mohari camp (MCP) area where the percentage of girls is little higher than boys (Boys:5.52% and girls 6.11%). Next is Silapathar (SLP) area where the college going Boys and girls are almost equal (Boys:3.88% and Girls: 3.33%). Lowest percentage of college going boys and girls was found in Dimow(DMW) area where the boys and girls going for higher education are 2.58% and 0.59% respectively. The reasons behind this situation stated by some local inhabitants were as follows a) boys passing or appearing their High school leaving certificate examinations go to Bangalore, Chennai or Kerala for earning

b) other few stated that due to desperation of jobless education they did not like to continue further higher studies rather they preferred to develop their skill in some factories or machinery shops. c) Girls' education in Demow (DMW) area is very poor and the gender disparity is quite alarming. The poor condition of girls' education is stated by some respondents as (i) the girls were not sent to the colleges or higher secondary schools because after 10th standard they are treated as the appropriate age for marriage (ii) after puberty restrictions are imposed on them so that they cannot freely mix up with college going boys (iii) girls were stopped from college going because they have to assist their mother in the house hold affairs (iv) some respondents stated that distance between the their residents and the colleges also matter to some extent (v) poverty is another factor for deprivation of girls from higher education and if there are both boys and girls in the house the preference is given to the boys only reasons are as stated above (vi) lack of electrification in the villages is also one of the causes of lower ratio in higher education system in Demow area (vii) the poor literacy rate among the Nepali people in the villages of Demow area is also another cause for not being aware of higher education.

On the other hand it was also found from the results that the percentage of college going boys and girls in Mohari camp (MCP) area is highest. As per the respondents' reply it was found that due to high literacy rate (75%) in these areas made aware of the people about the importance of education irrespective to boys and girls. The literate mothers or fathers encourage their daughters to go for higher studies. Few girls and boys coming out from these areas could show some good results in different fields which also inspired the guardians, some respondents stated. Good communication, no flood problem also help the guardians to send their children to the colleges and higher secondary schools. The people of Sissikalghar (SKL) and Machkhowa (MCK) areas suffer very much from frequent flood and dilapidated road communication problem. The students have to cover a long distance to their higher institutions. In this situation the girl students have to debar from college education. 50 percent girl students from both the areas have to stop college going. In Jonai (JNI) area also the situation is not encouraging. 50 percent girls only go for higher studies. The reasons are almost same as in DMW and MCK areas.

It was observed from the results and from the interviews with elderly persons of the areas that the Nepali community is showing little interest in girls' education but it cannot be said satisfactory. Lot of awareness programs on gender disparity issues have to be performed.

SUGGESTIONS:

Much awareness campaign for the improvement of women education in Nepali society has to be performed. The Nepali literary organizations, Nepali Students' Union should play a pivotal role in the remote villages to make the people aware of the empowerment of the women and the need of education. For the development of road communication the Government of Assam should play an active role so that not a single village remains inaccessible. Women organizations should visit the remote villages and make the guardians aware of their apathetic attitude for maintaining disparity among the boys and girls. Women Justice Forums should visit the Nepali villages very often for counseling the women.

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